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SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: GOU Takes Small Steps on Child Labor

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Uzbekistan recently announced two initiatives to address child labor in the country: the first is a legislative change that reportedly will hold individuals responsible for using children to work under hazardous conditions; the second is the dedication of 2010 to youth development. Both of these initiatives appear to address child labor in the cotton sector. End summary.

¶2. (U) On December 5, the Uzbek parliament's upper house approved a law introducing changes to its administrative code to improve the law on the protection of children's rights. This follows approval of the law on November 4 by the lower house. President Karimov is expected to sign it before the end of the year.

¶3. (U) Although the text of the law has not yet been made public, state-run media reported that the law will hold individuals, including parents, responsible for using children to work in conditions that could harm their health or safety. The law also reportedly imposes penalties on employers for breaking labor legislation related to the protection of adolescents. State-run media quoted one senator saying that the law was drawn up with the aim of implementing part of the national action plan adopted last year that addresses Uzbekistan's obligations under ILO Conventions 138 (Minimum Age of Employment) and 182 (Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor). The MFA's website notes that the adoption of the law is "directed at taking better care of the growing generation, which includes protection against performing heavy types of work that can present a hazard to health, become an obstacle to education, or cause damage to the physical, intellectual, or spiritual-moral development." (Note: Last June, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection issued a list of jobs in which children younger than 18 cannot be involved because of the unfavorable working conditions associated with the work. That list included cotton picking. Thus, there is a good chance that child labor in the cotton sector can be addressed with this legislation.)

¶4. (U) Also on December 5, while making a speech for Constitution Day, President Karimov announced that 2010 will be the "Year of the Harmoniously Developed Generation," focusing on developing healthy minds and bodies of young people. (Note: Such annual themes have been used in the past to focus attention, policy, and funding to specific areas.) On December 9, Karimov signed an instruction document creating a national commission to

develop and implement the 2010 "state program." Programming will cover several areas, including improvements in legislation related to the protection of the rights and interests of children and youth. Other priority areas include mother-child health programs, the educational system, developing digital technologies, attracting youth to small businesses and entrepreneurship, attracting youth to the science fields, and protection of youth from drug use, and other vices. The commission will be led by the prime minister, and it is expected to come out with details of the state program within 30 days.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: These measures support the view that, given time, the GOU often will take its own actions to address a problem. These two recent announcements, particularly the legislation, show that the GOU is taking some concrete steps to address the child labor problem on its own terms. While these may not be the steps that some in the international community would have preferred, it is important to recognize the progress, as well as the fact that neither of these two items could have happened without the expressed consent of President Karimov. The GOU has had no trouble selling its cotton crop, so it is doubtful that the "boycott" led to these steps. In fact, this is further evidence that quiet pressure can produce results. End comment.

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